DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 320 345 EC 231 154

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TITLE Teacher Reaction towards the Education and Labeling of the Gifted.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual National Conference of the National Council of States on Inservice Education (14th, San Antonio, TX, November 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; Elementary Education; *Gifted; *Labeling (of Persons); Program Implementation; *Special Classes; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Response

ABSTRACT

The study explored teacher attitudes towards gifted programming and the gifted label, and determined whether teacher attitudes changed after being involved with an elementary school gifted program. Twenty-nine elementary classroom teachers in Jefferson County, Colorado, were surveyed as their school was beginning to host a full-time, self-contained gifted program and again after being involved with the program for 8 months. The teachers, after initially being positive towards the program, reacted negatively concerning their own happiness, other teachers' happiness, and the desire to have the gifted program at their school. Teachers also had strong feelings that the gifted child probably did not want to be gifted and that gifted children are an elite group, have high expectations from parents, and lose friends. It is concluded that teachers and students should receive training on the unique needs of the gifted child so that a more equitable understanding takes place among the different groups. Includes eight references. (JDD)

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Teacher Reaction Towards the Education and Labeling of the Gifted

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Paper Presented at the 14th Annual National Conference
National Council of States on Inservice Education
San Antonio, Texas
November, 1989

EC 231 154

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Introduction

The intellectually gifted student has educational and emotional needs that are often not fulfilled in the regular classroom. Research indicates that gifted children need a separate educational program (Clark, 1988; Feldhusen, 1986). The process of selecting students for these programs may create both positive and negative effects for the family and school system.

Parents of these children may have many concerns about their child's giftedness and educational placement. They may be caught in the dilemma of being pleased about the identified giftedness, but at the same time worried about what problems there will be with the child's teachers, peers, and siblings. Parents often feel guilty that they are not doing all they can for children who have such great potential (Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982). The children labeled as "gifted" are often seen as being "born lucky" and not having to work very hard to achieve. This goes against the traditional American work ethic. Some feel it is unfair to become successful without strong effort (Cornell, 1985).

Students, too, can see that they are intellectually different than their chronological age peers. When they are labeled as gifted, they often are teased about being smart. School is too easy or too boring, and they often suffer emotionally. When an alternative program becomes available that might benefit the child, more questions and concerns may come about because the child has been identified,

labeled, and qualifies for the program. Students may perceive themselves differently and be confused. Friends they had before being labeled may drift away. Brothers, sisters, parents, and teachers may confuse the situation by reacting differently to the child.

The labeling of students and the initiation of gifted programs also can have a profound effect on teachers. The regular classroom teachers' reaction to labeling and the resultant special programming for gifted students has been the subject of little research. Jacobs (1972) found kindergarten and first grade teachers reacted negatively to highly intellectual students and tended to reflect the judgment that gifted youngsters should learn to hide their ablities in order to gain acceptance. Other studies by Parish, Dyck, and Kappes (1979) and Reschly and Lamprecht (1979) have shown teachers to view gifted children positively. Both studies contrasted the gifted label with several other handicapped labels so it is hardly surprising that teachers rated the gifted group higher than other labeled groups.

Maltby's (1984) study of the characteristics teachers are likely to look for in labeling a child as gifted expanded the previous findings. She found that if a child reads in pre-school, works in advance of peers, demonstrates high test results or has a gifted sibling, a teacher is more likely to use the gifted label.

Teachers, like parents and students, can have strong attitudes toward the labeling issue and the gifted program. Some teachers react negatively to the label of gifted and any special programming provided. They feel that all students should be able to excel in the regular classroom and attaching a label to a child just produces elitism and more problems for normal students. Still other teachers see a need for providing a differentiated program for the gifted student. The needs of the highly intellectual child would be better met in a homogeneously grouped classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to determine the attitudes of teachers towards gifted programming and the subsequent labeling of children as gifted. The secondary purpose of the study was to determine if teacher attitudes change after being involved with an elementary school gifted program.

Population for the Study

A total of 29 1st-6th grade teachers were subjects in this study. These individuals were experiencing having a full time self-contained gifted program in their school for the first time. The program, Challenging High Intellectual Potential Students (CHIPS), was a pilot program for identified students in Grades 1-6. The 85 students were previously in the regular classroom at one of 27 different elementary schools in Jefferson County, Colorado.

Identification of these students was accomplished through nomination by teachers or parents and scores on the Cognitive Abilities Test (COGAT). There was an individually self-contained class for each grade, 1-6. Students had exposure to peers and curriculum in the regular classroom for at least 1 year leading up to identification for the Challenge High Intellectual Potential Student (CHIPS) program.

Method of Procedure

This study employed the longitudinal survey method. The specific longitudinal design was a panel study with the same individuals surveyed over time. A student and parent questionnaire originally used by Colangelo and Brower(1987) was adapted and used with Dr. Colangelo's permission in this study of teacher attitudes.

This teacher instrument contains a Perception of School Communication Scale (PSC) to reflect the teachers' perceptions towards having a gifted educational program housed in their building. It also measures teacher attitudes towards the effects and use of the gifted label and to discover whether elitism is a product of gifted programs.

In August, 1987, 29 teachers were asked to participate in the study. Their questionnaires were completed upon returning to their schools in August during the first week of classes. The same questionnaire was given again to teachers in April, 1988.

Definition of Terms

Challenge High Intellectual Potential Student (CHIPS): A fulltime program for gifted children in the Jefferson County School System. There is a separate classroom for each grade level from first through sixth.

Labeling: The process of attaching a diagnostic label to a child so that special educational services may be made available. Common labels include Learning Disabled (LD), Mentally Retarded (MR), and Gifted.

Gifted: There is currently no universally accepted definition of what giftedness is. For the purpose of this study, gifted will refer to those students who are participating in the Challenge High Intellectual Potential Student (CHIPS) program. Identification for the program took place through teacher and parent nomination form and scores on the Cognitive Abilities Test.

Identification: The process of selecting a portion of the school population for special services or programming. This can be accomplished by, but not limited to, parent, teacher, or student nomination, scores on a standardized test, and student and parent interviews.

Results

The data summarized came from the first 7 questions on the teacher survey known as the Perception of Staff Communication Scale (PSC). Additional data were obtained from the last four questions on the survey concerning the effects of the gifted program on teachers, regular classroom students, and the school community.

Means and standard deviations for the teachers on Perception of Staff Communication Scale is presented in Table 1. On the pre-survey, teachers perceived themselves as being the most happy about having the program at their school (M = 1.86). Teacher's perceived regular classroom students as being the least happy (M = 3.41). On the post-survey teachers still perceived themselves as being the most receptive towards the program, although the mean (3.00) had changed to a less positive reaction. Regular classroom students were again perceived as the most negative (M = 3.71).

A separate analysis of variance was computed on each of the seven questions with change within subjects as the main effect. The variables of teachers' happiness, other teachers' happiness, and the teacher wanting to have the program for gifted students at their school were significant. By looking at the means it is evident the change that occurred from pre to post-survey for the teachers. Teachers' happiness began with a mean of 1.86 on the pre-survey and ended up at 3.00 on the post-survey, a

Table 1

Rank Order of Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers Perception of Staff Communication Scale (PSC)

Variables	n	M	SD
Pre-survey			
Teacher's happiness	29	1.86	.35
Wants school to have CHIPS	29	2.52	.99
Other teachers' happiness	29	2.62	1.45
Would want own student selected	29	2.66	.97
Staff communication	29	2.76	.87
Attention given to CHIPS student	29	2.83	1.47
Students' happiness	29	3.41	2.08
Post-survey			
Staff Communication	29	2.38	1.20
Attention given to CHIPS student	29	2.52	.99
Would want own student selected	29	2.66	.90
Teacher's happiness	29	3.00	1.34
Wants school to have CHIPS	29	3.24	1.46
Other teachers' happiness	29	3.48	1.18
Students' happiness	29	3.71	1.75

difference of 1.13. Teachers perceived other teachers' happiness at 2.62 on the pre-survey and 3.48 on the post-survey. Teachers were not very positive towards having the program for gifted students at their school on the pre-survey with a mean of 2.52, but their perceptions became even less positive on the post-survey with a mean of 3.24. A summary of the analysis of variance is given in Table 2.

Further support for this negative change in teacher feelings towards the gifted program is evident in the teacher opinion questions. Teachers had an opportunity to respond to 4 opinion questions at the end of the survey. Teachers could respond to the effects the program had on them, regular classroom students, the school community, and their overall feeling about the program for gifted students. On the pre-survey teachers were most positive about their overall feelings towards the gifted program (M = 2.28) and least positive about the effect the program for gifted children has on the regular student (M = 2.76). On the post-survey the teachers were most positive about the effect the gifted program has on the school community (M = 2.97) and least positive about the effects the program for gifted students has on themselves (M = 3.10). Means and standard deviations for the teacher opinion questions are presented in Table 3.

The Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was computed for the teacher opinion questions with change from pre-survey to post-survey as the main factor. The Wilk's

Table 2

Analysis of Variance Involving Change within Teachers' Pre and Post Scores on "Perception of Staff Communication" (PSC)

Variable	df	Mean square	F
Teacher's happiness	1	18.78	21.26**
Other teachers' happiness	1	10.78	5.85*
Students' happiness	1	8.34	3.40
Would want own student selected	1	0.00	0.00
Staff communication	1	2.09	1.99
Attention given to CHIPS student	1	1.40	.91
Wants school to have CHIPS	1	9.93	6.31*

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Table 3

Rank Order of Means and Standard Deviations for Teacher Opinion Questions

Variables	n	M	SD
Pre-survey			
Overall feelings about CHIPS	29	2.28	.70
Effect on teacher	29	2.48	.69
Effect on school community	29	2.69	.66
Effect on regular students	29	2.76	.58
Post-survey			
Effect on school community	29	2.72	.70
Overall feelings about CHIPS	29	2.97	.98
Effect on regular students	29	3.00	.66
Effect on teacher	29	3.10	.94

test was significant at .004 so separate univariate tests were run on each variable. A significant change was found for the effect on teachers and the teachers' overall feelings about the gifted program. Both scores were more negative on the post-survey with the effect on the teacher changing from a mean of 2.48 to 3.10, and the overall feelings about the program for gifted students changing from 2.28 to 2.97. The Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) and separate univariate tests are summarized in Table 4.

The attitudes of regular classroom teachers toward the effects and use of the "gifted" label was also explored in this study. Means and standard deviations for the labeling questions appear in Table 5. A score of "1" is equivalent to "Strongly Agree," and a score of "5" is equivalent to "Strongly Disagree."

To analyze the data, the Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was run with change within-subjects as the main effect. The Wilk's Test was significant, so separate univariate tests were computed for each variable. This was done to see which variables changed from pre to posttest in subjects' reactions towards the gifted label. There was a significant change on the variable of "Gifted are an Elite Group" and "Gifted Have High Expectations From Parents. The teachers changed significantly on both variables. For the variable "Gifted are an Elite Group," teachers changed from 3.03 on the pre-survey to 2.38 on the post-survey. This

Table 4

Multivariate and Univariate Analysis of Variance for Teacher Opinion Questions

	MANOVA				ANOVA	
Source	Wilks	df	F	p	df	F
	.5580	4,25	4.95	.004		
Effect on teacher					1,28	11.66**
Effect on regular students					1,28	3.55
Effect on school community					1,28	.05
Overall feelings about CHIPS					1,28	12.79**

** $p < .01$

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations for Gifted Labeling Scale: Teacher Perceptions

Variable	n	M	SD
		Pre/Post	Pre/Post
Gifted have a high IQ	29	2.07/1.79	.59/ .90
Gifted are good at everything	29	4.10/4.48	.62/ .74
Gifted are teased	29	2.83/2.76	.66/ .91
Gifted are an elite group	29	3.30/2.38	.73/ .98
Gifted lose a lot of friends	29	3.07/2.79	.65/ .82
Gifted get good grades	29	2.79/2.93	.77/ .92
Gifted have high expectations from parents	29	2.86/1.76	.79/ .87
Gifted have high expectations from teachers	29	3.24/2.76	.79/ .79
Gifted do not want to be gifted	29	3.21/3.10	.62/ .56

shows that teachers saw the gifted as more of an elite group after observing a gifted program in their building. For the variable "Gifted Have High Expectations From Parents," teachers changed from 2.86 on the pre-survey to 1.76 on the post-survey. This shows that teachers changed concerning their perceptions of gifted having high expectations from parents after observing a gifted program in their building. The results are summarized in Table 6.

Summary of Subjective Comments

Teachers were given the opportunity to express written comments on their survey. The frequency of each comment was tabulated. Responses marked "other" were comments that could not be categorized with any other negative or positive response or were comments that did not address the question.

How CHIPS affects regular classroom teachers is summarized in Table 7. There was no real trend on the pre-survey with 45% of the teachers choosing not to write a comment. Ten teachers wrote various positive statements towards having the program while 4 teachers thought the CHIPS students were discipline problems. Two changes are evident on the summary of the post-survey data. First, teachers felt a greater need or desire to comment, as only 17% did not write a comment. The other change was in the increase in the number of written negative remarks (n = 15). Comments were again made about too many discipline problems and two teachers did not see the program as a necessary alternative.

Table 6

Multivariate and Univariate Analysis of Variance for Tests Involving Change Within-Subject Effects for Pre-Test/Post-Test of the Gifted Label: Questions 8 - 16

	MANOVA				ANOVA	
Variables	Wilks	df	F	p	df	F
	.789	18,376	2.63	.0001		
High IQ					2,196	.67
Good at everything					2,196	1.09
Teased about being smart					2,196	2.60
Gifted are an elite group					2,196	6.07**
Lose a lot of friends					2,196	.30
Get good grades					2,196	.14
High expectations from parents					2,196	9.76**
High expectations from teachers					2,196	1.79
Don't want to be gifted					2,196	.42

** $p < .01$

Table 7

Teacher Subjective Comments on how CHIPS Program Affects Teachers

Comment	n	%
Pre-Survey		
Chips students are discipline problems	4	14
Looking forward to having program at school	4	14
Other positive reactions	4	14
Chips teachers can be used as a resource	2	7
No effect yet	2	7
No comment	13	45
Post-Survey		
Other negative reactions	7	24
Other positive reactions	6	21
Too many discipline problems	6	21
No effect at all	3	10
Can't see that the program is really necessary	2	7
No comment	5	17

Comments made about how the program affects students in the regular classroom and the community showed a negative increase from pre to post-survey. On the pre-survey teachers reported no negative reactions from other students and the community towards the program. A summary of comments made on the post-survey shows six teachers reported negative reactions from other students and the community towards the program.

Overall concerns from the teachers included thoughts about better use of district money for a program of this type, the need for more integration of CHIPS students with the regular classroom, and the feeling that a pull-out program would better meet the needs of the CHIPS population.

Discussion

Every student should have an opportunity for their intellectual potential to be discovered and nurtured. It is doubtful that educators would argue against such a statement. There is often concern among gifted education professionals that the academic and social/emotional needs of gifted students are not met in the regular classroom. When we begin identifying and segregating the high intellectual student, the discussions and disagreements begin to take place. Questions about elitism, negative effects of the gifted label, and concerns about the adequacy of the grade level curriculum are common.

The present study explored teacher attitudes towards gifted programming and the gifted label. Teachers were surveyed as their school was beginning to host a full time gifted program, and again after being involved with the program for 8 months.

Regular classroom teachers, after initially being positive towards the program, reacted negatively concerning their own happiness, other teachers' happiness, and the desire to have the gifted program at their school. Teachers also had strong feelings that the gifted child probably did not want to be gifted, that gifted children are an elite group, have high expectations from parents, and lose friends. This change came after hosting an elementary program for gifted students in their schools for the first time.

Conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the present research revolve around teacher training, school structure, and articulation. The impetus for new attitudes must come first from educators. Every classroom teacher should obtain training and support in dealing with the highly intellectual child. The gifted student cannot fend for himself and be expected to grow academically or socially/emotionally without proper nurturance. Gifted students may need a higher degree of support and motivation than students who are not gifted.

A school structure should be set up with staffs trained to meet the diverse needs for a wide range of student abilities. Additional support should be given to teachers in dealing with the gifted student. Comprehensive identification procedures should unlock possible areas of potential in all students. Special opportunities for academic and social/emotional growth can then be planned both in and out of the regular classroom setting. Students should be taught from the start that school is a place to learn new concepts and ideas, and to grow as a person. In order to achieve this goal for every student, it is necessary to allow for academic challenges throughout the school building. If a child is ready for new skills, then he/she should be allowed to pursue them.

Articulation between elementary, junior, and senior high schools is imperative. The goal should be towards a K-12 structure that builds upon what students already know,

rather than repeating previously learned concepts and skills. This can become a realization through regular communication about curriculum and instructional practices among the three schools and careful individual recordkeeping on each student.

The results of the present research study add further support to what many gifted education professionals are saying needs to happen with our gifted student population. Partial segregation of these students is important to allow for increased academic challenges with intellectual peers. Teachers and students must be inserviced on the unique needs of the gifted child so that a more equitable understanding takes place among the different groups. This may help reduce the negative attitudes that teachers form about gifted education when a program for gifted students is being hosted at their school.

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